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DE RUEHNJ #0431/01 0791141
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 201141Z MAR 06
FM AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3375
INFO RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA 0982
RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 0290
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 0655
RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO 0529
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 0333
RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM 0068
RUEHLC/AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE 0729
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1221
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 2499
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1609
RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE 0978

C O N F I D E N T I A L NDJAMENA 000431

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/C, INR, DRL, DS/IP/AF, DS/IP/ITA;
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICAWATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/23/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [CD](#)

SUBJECT: CHAD: FRENCH VERSION OF COUP ATTEMPT, DEBY'S
PLIGHT

REF: A. A. NDJAMENA 351
[1](#)B. B. NDJAMENA 418
[1](#)C. C. PARIS 1680

Classified By: P/E Officer Haywood Rankin for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: According to the French Ambassador, the March 14 coup activity involved another member of Deby's extended clan and has made him more paranoid and less amenable to reason. The supposed coup leader, commander of an armored squadron in the presidential protective reserve force, is a close relative of recently-defected General Seby Aguid and fled east, after the opportunistic and poorly-planned plot (which is being reported by the Chadian government as an attempt to bring down the presidential aircraft) was nipped in the bud. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) The French Ambassador, Jean-Pierre Bercot, accompanied by his DCM and defense attache, invited Ambassador Wall, accompanied by DCM, DATT, and poloff, to the French Residence for a briefing March 17 on the March 14 coup activity (refs B, C).

French Account of the Coup Actions

[1](#)3. (C) The French defense attache recounted that President Deby had departed Chad on the morning of the 14th for a meeting of Central African presidents in Equatorial Guinea. That same morning an officer of the armored squadron of the new presidential protective reserve force (DGSSIE), based six kilometers north of Ndjamena (near the airport and French base) and commanded by Colonel Ramadan Bakhit, made a request at the central ammunition depot for munitions necessary to secure the airport. The personnel at the depot asked whether the request had been authorized by the Presidency. When no such authorization was provided, the depot notified the Presidency of what seemed a suspicious request. The Presidency alerted President Deby in Bata, Equatorial Guinea; and Mahamat Saleh, Deby's uncle and head of the new force, took action to intercept the plotters. Colonel Bakhit, with 30 colleagues, fled Ndjamena eastwards; five were captured in

the East, in the area of Biltine. In the defense attache's analysis, the plotters had not elaborated a careful plan. Colonel Bakhit was, he noted, a cousin of recently-defected General Seby Aguid and a member of the clan of the Erdimi twins, who had defected in December.

14. (C) Bercot took over the presentation, providing further detail. He said that Colonel Bakhit, the supposed mastermind, had ordered his deputy to make the request for the ammunition for his squadron's armored vehicles. When the deputy had made the request at the depot, officers at the depot came back to Bakhit asking about the absence of approval from the Presidency. Bakhit fingered the deputy as behind a coup plot. The innocent deputy was detained and beaten, while Bakhit and co-conspirators made their escape from Ndjamena. Deby was informed at 2:30-3:00 in the afternoon in Bata, and at first communicated with no one. Then Deby contacted his commanders in the East to see if rebel forces were coming across the border, and then he told his fellow heads of state at the CEMAC meeting, where he was supposed to be elected new chairman, of his need to return to Ndjamena immediately. Gabon's Bongo offered his personal airplane and contacted the French, who asked that Deby not return until dark, when the French, using night-vision equipment, could secure the Ndjamena airport without drawing undue attention to the French role. Deby returned at 9:00 pm on Bongo's plane to an airport fully secured by the French military.

Deby Under Siege

15. (C) Bercot said that this coup plotting came in the context of heightened supply of the Chadian rebels by Sudan. Within the past five days, the Sudanese government had supplied 30 Toyota Land Cruisers to the rebels -- it was not clear whether to Yahya Dillo's Zaghawa group or to Muhammad Nur's Tama group but Bercot suspected the latter, since he believed that Salih Ghosh, Sudan's key official in matters of supplying such groups, had little trust in the Chadian Zaghawans and would prefer to deal with Muhammad Nur. (Bercot believed the picture of supply of the rebels was complicated further by strong opposition among Sudan's Arab allies in Darfur to any arming of Chadian rebels of any stripe.) Meanwhile, Bercot said he was informed of contacts between Chad's opposition figures (Yorongar specifically) with the Erdimis. The opposition were shamelessly calling for Deby's overthrow by force. Bercot warned that, while he personally did not believe there was an American connection, there had now developed an article of faith among the opposition that the United States government and Exxon were actively supporting Tom Erdimi (living in Houston).

16. (C) Ambassador Wall said that, as Bercot well knew, the presence of Tom Erdimi in the United States and a single contact by the State Department with him did not constitute support. The United States had no "preferred candidate" in Chad but rather emphasized the need to encourage a peaceful transition of power in Chad. He recalled Bercot's proposal in an earlier conversation (ref A) of discussing with Deby the idea of his committing to stand down after serving one further year, during which he would be treated with full honor.

17. (C) Bercot said that he would have to cut short the conversation as he was expected momentarily for yet another meeting with Deby. It was not the moment to propose ideas to Deby. Deby was in a distracted state. The coup attempt had further diminished Deby's confidence and standing, weakening an already weakened president. Bercot was afraid to push him into a corner. Every defection and coup attempt increased Deby's psychosis and made it harder to reason with him. Deby was now given to making outlandish requests, such as for helicopters and anti-tank weapons, to which of course France had to say no. The previous two days had destroyed all that Bercot had hoped to be able to accomplish with Deby.

Now Deby was insistent on going to Abeche and staying there to take command of his forces against what he expected to be a double-pronged attack by the rebels -- exactly when and where Deby did not know. Bercot had tried to reason with Deby that his problem lay not in Abeche but in Ndjamena. The French base in Abeche stood as an incontrovertible obstacle to any group of rebels, who could hold no territory in the East for longer than 24 hours, unless the Sudanese army crossed the border, which would be an act of war.

18. (C) Ambassador Wall commented that Bercot's analysis seemed to suggest that Deby was not open to influence when he was weakened, while at the same time he was not open to influence when he was strong. Bercot was not sure how rational he would find Deby and whether Deby would be open to any advice. Part of Deby's malaise at present was that he was torn between two camps of advisors. On the one hand, he had his new wives and the Arab, Gorane, and Southern advisors around him, on the other there was the Zaghawa clique. Ambassador Wall pointed out that the latter seemed to be fast diminishing, to which Bercot demurred, saying that there was still a substantial core of Itno Bideiyat Zaghawans who were close to him. The two groups were constantly vying, leaving Deby torn between them.
WALL